Civil Rights History Project
Interview completed by the Southern Oral History Program
under contract to the
Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture
and the Library of Congress, 2013

Interviewee:	Mr. Elmer Dixon
Interview Date:	February 28, 2013
Location:	Seattle, Washington
Interviewer:	Dr. David P. Cline
Videographer:	John Bishop
Length:	02:32:32

John Bishop: Okay, we're rolling. So, David, you want to do the slate?

David Cline: Okay.

JB: First, let me say that you're on Channel 2.

DC: Okay.

JB: Mr. Dixon is on Channel 1.

DC: Okay. So, this is David Cline. I'm on Channel 2. I'm going to be talking today with Mr. Elmer Dixon, who is on Channel 1. We are in Seattle, Washington. Today's date is February the 28th, 2013. Again, this is David Cline for the Smithsonian and Mr. Elmer Dixon.

JB: Okay. So, we're rolling.

DC: Okay! So, I wanted to thank you very much, again, for meeting with me today—

Elmer Dixon: A pleasure and an honor.

DC: To tell your story. And what I'd like to do is start by just having you talk a little bit about the family that you were raised in, where they came, how you ended up here in Seattle, and what kind of home and values you feel that you were raised with.

ED: Okay. Yeah, my—both parents were originally from [clears throat] Chicago. Actually, my father was from Kentucky, born in Kentucky, but moved to Chicago at a young age and was raised there. And my mother was raised in Chicago as well, but her parents had come up through the great southern migration from the South, [clears throat] from Mississippi. And so, both of them had—well, my mother clearly—southern roots. My grandmother used to say that Kentucky's not the South; it's a border state. [Laughs] But, as we know, it's got some southern aspects to it.

But so, I was born in Chicago and spent my early years between Chicago and Champaign, Illinois, where my father worked at an Air Force base. He actually was a World War II vet, but he was an illustrator who graduated from the Chicago Art Institute and [clears throat] so he worked on illustrating engineers' designs for aircraft or aircraft parts.

And [clears throat] he eventually decided to move away from Illinois. I think he loved Chicago and the Chicago area, but he was an adventuresome sort. And, part of that story is, of course, he wanted to get as far as he could [laughs] away from his mother-in-law, but [laughter]. But so, he got an opportunity to work at Boeing—and this would have been in 1957—and as an illustrator. And, of course back then, you know, there were no computer enhancements or computer drawings. Everything was done by hand. And that's what brought us to the Northwest.

One of the things that I reflect on when I tell my story and my transition—I did a presentation in Lille, France, in 2010, and it was at a conference with an organization called the Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research. And for the last twenty-six-plus

years, I've been doing work in the field of diversity and cross-cultural communication. And [clears throat] during that span of time—and I'll come back around to this—during that span of time, we have a lot of corporate clients, and so [laughs] my identity as a Panther never was talked about or spoken about. Only people in the Northwest who were clients, who knew of my past, knew that I was connected to the Black Panther Party. But my corporate clients—and I've sat in offices with the CEO of PepsiCo and other major companies around the United States, and no one ever knew.

But here was an opportunity at this particular—they call it a congress that SIETAR Europa holds every three to four years. At this particular SIETAR conference in France, the theme of their conference was "Human Rights and Cultural Diversity: Where Do You Draw the Line?" And I saw that as a perfect opportunity to talk about that topic because of my own experiences as a member of the Black Panther Party and also as an interculturalist through the work that I do. And so, in fact, my speech was titled "From Revolutionary to Interculturalist."

But I think that's a [0:05:00] kind of an interesting concept, as I've thought about it, because I actually probably began my early life in some ways as an interculturalist and never knew it, never realized it at the time. And that was because of the values that our parents instilled in us, but also the environment that we grew up in. In Chicago, we lived on the South Side. I stayed with my grandmother on my mother's side of the family for a couple of years as a young toddler. But on the South Side of Chicago, then as today, it's largely a segregated community, largely black. [Clears throat] And in Champaign, while I don't remember much about the neighborhood in Champaign—I know we were in a housing project there—I don't remember too many different-color friends at that young age. I don't know if I would have noticed, but I knew

that—looking back, I know that Chicago on the South Side, it was a predominately—it was a black community.

When we moved to Seattle, and it took us a couple of years to settle in the home that my mother still lives in, Madrona. We moved in that home in 1960. And, as a ten-year-old, moving into this neighborhood in Madrona, it was like landing in the proverbial melting pot, if you will. I don't like to refer to the U.S. as a melting pot—more like a salad bowl rather than a melting pot—but that was the neighborhood in which we landed in. And it was a neighborhood that had been, maybe thirty-forty years earlier, a predominately white neighborhood, a Jewish neighborhood. There were synagogues in the area. And what happened, as has happened in most inner cities, as blacks moved in, whites would move out. And in this particular neighborhood, a little bit of everyone moved in.

DC: Yeah.

ED: And so, on the playground, which is across the street from our home that we grew up in, it was the gathering place. And [clears throat] I'll tell you, you could go onto that playground and interact with white kids, who were average income, rich kids, rich white kids who lived across the red zone line, which happened to be two blocks from our home.

DC: Um-hmm.

ED: We didn't know it at the time, the red-lining district. And there was Chinese, there were Japanese, there were Filipino, there were Latino, Mexican-American. It was just everybody was there, and black, of course.

DC: Right.

ED: And while it was, I think, largely black, it had—you know, percentage wise—but everybody else was there, as well. And so, that was the environment in which we grew up in and at the schools that we attended.

But the other side of that was the influences that our parents had on us. And while they had grown up or gone through life, their adult life and early life, with some consciousness of what was going on in America—I don't know how you could be unconscious to it in the '40s, '50s, [pause] '60s. My father, when he was—I think he was in high school at the time, or had just graduated when Pearl Harbor was bombed. And he and his buddies, who had formed a—and they may have been in their first year of college—had formed a group called the Four Feathers that was named after the Four Feathers at Notre Dame.

DC: Um-hmm.

ED: And they actually had sweaters, which my mom still has the sweater today, with the feather on it and the number four on it. And they were a tight-knit group. They all went out and they volunteered for the draft because they wanted to fight and defend their country. And when they were able to—

DC: And these are four black men?

ED: These are four black men.

DC: Yeah.

ED: And they were able to get through the induction process and they were assigned their orders to go to boot camp. It had some city on there that they didn't know where it was, and I think it said "MS" at the end, and they were thinking they were going to Massachusetts or someplace. [Laughter] Well, as it turned out, they were going to Mississippi. And [clears throat], so when they got down there, of course, in segregated living quarters, you know, segregated

camp, if you will, they would drill and go through the regular rigors of boot camp in preparation for, you know, preparing to fight at some point.

And [0:10:00] [clears throat] on probably more than one occasion, as my father recounted these stories—if you kind of remember any of the old movies where soldiers are marching off to fight in this big war they called World War II, the Big One, and the confetti would be flying and people would be standing on the side of the street, waving flags and cheering them on, you know, as they got ready to go out and defend America. And so, when they walked through this Mississippi town, they weren't greeted by confetti and flags. They were greeted by crowds that were booing and hissing at them, and spitting and throwing things and calling them "nigger." And it was a—while I'm sure my father wasn't oblivious to this, but it was kind of a rude awakening: you know, in 1942 or '43, whenever that was that they were getting ready to go put their lives on the line to defend America, they had this strong sense of pride and patriotism to go defend the United States after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and to be treated like that.

But those and other incidents that occurred—you know, my mother had her fair share of incidents about her color—but they never, those things never colored their perception of other people. It never left them with a negative sense of who other people were or are. And so, we always learned to, as Dr. King used to say, "Judge people by the content of their character and not the color of their skin," and I think that was one of the principal values that we grew up with that was so strong in our household.

[Clears throat] And so, I remember during those early years and as we were developing and living in this environment that my father had a fierce protective sense about his family and about his kids. And I remember on one occasion—I had two very close friends out of all of these people, kids that I met. I tended to be kind of an outgoing kid. And on our block there was a

black family that was large that was at the end of our street, and there was a white family next-door to them. In fact, everybody in the neighborhood called the woman "Auntie Barbara." So, she was like [laughs], you know, the auntie—you know, you always hear about the auntie—and she was a white woman. And then, her son—actually, I think it was maybe either her grandson or stepson—was a good friend of ours.

But my two best friends were two young white guys who I had met through school, and we used to hang out a lot. But we always used to get in our mischief, as well. And I remember we used to go and get eggs from the local store and go throw them at passing cars. And one evening, we were out tossing eggs, and Aaron, my brother Aaron, was with us at the time. And everybody had tossed the eggs and took off. And we missed the car. And so, I wasn't leaving. I was determined to land my egg. And a car came through—I didn't notice it was the same car that had barely gotten missed before—and I launched my egg. And as it hit, the car stopped, the guy got out and ran up and grabbed me. And I don't think he meant any real ill. I think he was trying to scold me and tell me that was not right or whatever.

But here I was, eleven or twelve years old, and I was, you know, like petrified and mad and struggling and got away. And ran—it was more than a block from our home—and ran to the house and burst through the door and told my father this man was attacking me. And he grabbed the nearest thing he could grab, a hammer or whatever, and went right out the door, you know, because no one was going to attack his kid. But that was, you know, that fierce protection of your family was one thing that we learned.

And so, on any given weekend, [clears throat] my parents would have guests over. And on one weekend, they might have one of their black friends over, a black couple, and they would

sit down and listen to Ellington and, you know, Count Basie. We grew up with a lot of music in our house. And then, on other occasions, there would be different people that would come over.

And I remember on Saturday mornings, many times, that we would get up, and it was [0:15:00] "wax-the-floor" days. And my mother still lives in this big house. It's a big, huge, four-bedroom house built around the turn of the twentieth century, like in 1908. It's a very sturdy big home. And we would have to roll back the—push back the furniture, roll up the carpets, and on our hands and knees—the boys.

DC: Um-hmm.

ED: Not my sister. She got to—she got off of that duty [laughter]. We had to get on—

DC: How many are there in your family?

ED: There's four of us.

DC: Okay.

ED: And she's the oldest, and then the three boys, and I'm the middle son. And so, we [clears throat] had to get on our hands and knees and wax these floors, these hardwood floors, to a high luster. And while we were doing so, my father would have playing on the hi-fi *La Bohème*, *Madame Butterfly*, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, so we learned an appreciation for opera at a very young age. And so, we had a full range of appreciation of different kinds of music. That was, again, that kind of broad, kind of cultural overlay.

But we found out later [clears throat] why we had to polish the floors: because on certain nights of the month, he would invite his Scandinavian friends over. And they were from various parts of Scandinavia and lived in various parts of the city, but they were all white. A couple of them were Jewish. And they would come in and they would do these loud Scandinavian dances,

[laughter] dancing on the floor. You could hear the wooden floors just rocking with this, with these dances, these Scandinavian dances.

And so, when I think about [clears throat] the cross-cultural experiences that we had as kids—we would go over to some of the Jewish friends' homes on Easter, actually on their Passover, and I ate my first matzo ball when I was probably eleven years old and gained [laughing] a high appreciation and liking for Jewish culture, and especially the eating of the festive food that they ate. And they would come over and, you know, maybe share an Easter dinner with us. There was almost like a cultural exchange that was going on there. [Phone ringing in background]

And on other occasions, of the two white friends that I mentioned, one was—his mother was a second generation—I believe she was second generation Russian. I know her mother was first generation, his grandmother. And so, we would go over there—I would go over to their house on Christmas celebrations. And they were Orthodox Christians and they ate certain kinds of foods that were very unique to that Russian culture. And so, it was a pretty interesting experience growing up in that neighborhood, in terms of the exposure to the different types of cultures and individuals that were in that neighborhood.

There was a popular grocery store, a small little store around the corner from us, called Joe's Supermarket. And Joe and his wife, Mae, were Chinese immigrants, and they were very well-known in the community. And I remember once after one of my friends taught me how to steal candy bars, I was nervous as heck, you know. You were asking me whether or not I would get nervous. I don't get nervous talking, but I remember when I was trying to steal this one candy bar, I was probably so nervous, you know, because it was outside of my, you know, [laughter] what I believed one should do. But he said, "Nah, you can do it! Get it!" And Mae caught me,

and for the next, I think, twenty years, she called me "Bad Boy." [Laughter] But she would joke about it in later years.

But it was—[clears throat] it was a close relationship that everyone had in that neighborhood. And, as I said, we came from so many different cultural backgrounds, it was an important development in our lives and eventually in mine, in terms of this full circle, in terms of the work that I do today.

DC: And I imagine your—just a quick pause? Yeah.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Now we're going again.

DC: Okay. I was going to ask—for your father at Boeing, which I imagine wasn't a largely African American workforce, I mean, I imagine he had to navigate that world as well.

ED: You know, I—[clears throat] I'm not sure how much he had to navigate. I'm sure he did have to navigate, but he was—you know, when you talk about influences, there are several things that I pulled from my experience growing up with my parents. And one of the things that I, two of the things that I got from my father, [0:20:00] was his outgoingness. Everybody loved him, and he could make friends like in a minute. You know, he was very—I guess charismatic is one way to put it. But he was [laughs], he was very smooth; he was easy to get along with.

And so, he made friends very quickly at Boeing. In fact, many of those people—I suppose that he met many of them at Boeing. I'm sure all of them did not work at Boeing. He had to meet them in some other connection, you know. I know that he had some connection with some of the civil rights organizations, as well as I think even there may have been, you know, kind of the taboo back then, the Communist Party members. I don't know to what degree he interacted with those folks, but all of those people that I mentioned who I've known through

adulthood have all had very progressive positions about things in society. And so, there had to be some connection, and some of them, in fact, were part of like the Socialist Workers Party, or whatever.

So, he was a very outgoing person, and that was one of the things that I absorbed from his personality. The other thing was the adventurism. He was always looking to find some adventure in life. I remember there was a program on TV back when we were growing up called "Adventures in Paradise," and this ship called the *Kon-Tiki* [Note: the *Tiki*] would sail around the world and stop in exotic places. And he had been stationed in Hawaii during his tour. He ended up in Okinawa, in that part of the world, during the war and had always wanted to go back to Hawaii someday. And he used to tell us that he was going to, you know, sell the house, quit his job, and get a big boat and sail us around the world—

DC: Right.

ED: You know, on these adventures. So, he was a big dreamer in that way. And that was the other thing that I took from him. And I think what it resulted in for me, personally, was a kind of a can-do attitude, which would come into play initially when I got into the Black Panther Party and later in life as I embarked on my own personal life. Because, as a member of the Black Panther Party, we were all-in for the community and we didn't have any selfish desires or individual desires at that point of our life.

But anyway, so that was kind of the [coughs] the foundation of my growing up. We also—we marched with King when he came here in '65, so my father and mother were very much aware of the surroundings. And, you know, the kind of awareness-building for me, or the political awareness that I came to, was—it was rather quite sudden, but it wasn't like I wasn't aware of things that were happening along the way. I remember significant events, very

significant events, in history and ultimately their impact on me. I remember, obviously, Kennedy being elected. But I remember him being assassinated in ’63, and sitting in front of the TV and kind of mimicking the soldiers as they were marching along with his coffin, and seeing Ruby assassinated on live TV—not Ruby, but Oswald being assassinated on live TV. I remember Medgar Evers being shot. I remember the bombing of the Baptist church and the three little girls and seeing their bloodstained clothes.

On nightly TV, you know, it seemed like—we had a routine, of course, as I think many families did then and maybe today still, where when we got home, you know, we had to finish our homework before we could go out to the park or go do something. Homework was done, dinner was on the table at six o’clock, and we had to be there at the table. It was important to my father that we eat around the table together as a family; we did that every night. And then, after dinner was over, wash the dishes, put them away, because everybody had a routine. [Laughs] In fact, I used that same routine when I was raising my family: Someone washed, someone dried, and someone put them away. And so, after that was done, then there was time to watch TV.

And then, of course, I remember on the nightly evening [0:25:00] news spots seeing the, you know, incidents like the Bloody Sunday on the Pettus Bridge, and demonstrators being beaten by police and hosed by firefighters and bitten by police dogs. You know, those were very vivid scenes. And I think it was painful for me, in that I was a young boy growing up who, while I had aspirations of being a doctor—you know, I think that a lot of kids relate to people that kind of protect the community.

DC: Um-hmm.

ED: So, being a police officer or a firefighter was a position that you looked at with respect. And seeing that dichotomy with these protectors of society being brutal and being the

opposite of what you would expect was an interesting way to view how things were shaking out in our real world. And I didn't realize it at the time, but those things would become part of my psyche and part of my growth and development.

One of my colleagues that I work with today he talks about the effects of racism, and he says that it's not a single incident. You know, sometimes people ask you, "So, when have you been discriminated against?" Or, "What has happened to you?" And it's not a single incident. He calls it a series of micro abrasions. You know, it's like when you have a wound or a sore, and it scabs over, and you keep picking at the scab because it's bothering you, that over time it's like this wound that never goes away. And he compares the experience, in its whole, of racism and oppression and all of the things that have occurred, not only to blacks, but to other people that have been oppressed, as this series of micro abrasions.

So, as I saw these things, they were having some impact, but I didn't realize just how so. And it was in the summer of, I believe, 1967—it was either '67 or '66—

DC: And what year were you born?

ED: I was born in 1950.

DC: That's right.

ED: So, I was a sixteen-year-old or a seventeen-year-old at the time. My brother, Aaron, being a year older than me, was a little—his awareness point [coughs] actually happened before mine. And [drinks water] we would talk about these [coughs] occurrences [clears throat], but I wasn't fully into this awareness piece yet.

It was also an interesting time, because in the mid '60s the black awareness movement was happening, and it hadn't hit me yet. I don't think it had hit our city yet. In '65 I was still skateboarding with my two very close white friends. You know, we would go up to Crater Lake,

which is the second-deepest lake in the world, and we went up there with his parents, his mother and siblings, and we got on our skateboards and skateboarded down. That was in ’65. So, you know, I was a fifteen-year-old at the time and so I hadn’t gotten into awareness of who I was as, you know, as a black person.

And my brother—it was, like I said, either ’66 or ’67—invited or told me that I needed to go hear this speaker that was coming to Garfield High School, and the speaker’s name was Stokely Carmichael. And I didn’t know much about Stokely. I had heard a little bit. Aaron and I had talked a little bit. But I did know that—you know, I was aware of the Watts Rebellions and the Detroit Rebellions. It’s an interesting thing, you know. Of course, people refer to them as riots, the Watts Riots and the Detroit Riots.

There was a well-known musician and writer who wrote several high-profile R&B songs that were successful in the charts, and the writer, the songwriter, was white. And after the Watts and Detroit rebellions, he wrote an essay in which he said that the rebellions in Detroit and Watts were a natural response to [0:30:00] the conditions in which those people lived. And because of that, he was blacklisted. He didn’t get any record contracts for another ten to fifteen years. And so, I was aware of those things, but it hadn’t kind of meshed for me yet, all of those things that were occurring.

And so, I went to hear Stokely and I remember vividly the things that Stokely was talking about, Stokely Carmichael was talking about. And one of the things I remember him saying was that the problem with the black community is that black people don’t love themselves. And he said, “You hate the color of your skin and you want to be white.” And he said, “Look at how you’ve been programmed. You know, when you go to a movie theater and you see the good knight and the bad knight, why is the good knight always on a white horse and the bad knight

always on a black horse? When you turn on your TV and you look at a western, why is the good cowboy dressed in white, wears a ten-gallon hat and rides a horse named Trigger, a white horse named Trigger, and the bad cowboy is named Dirty Bart, and he's in black clothes and on a black horse?" And he said, "Even when you go sit down and eat food, you order cake for dessert, and Angel's Food cake is white and Devil's Food cake is black." And he made all these analogies, and I was thinking, "Ah, that has nothing to do with anything. I don't hate the fact that I'm black."

And after I had left that rally, and I was sitting on the playground. I remember I was sitting on the tennis courts. And the tennis courts, the playground and the tennis courts are right across the street from our house, so during the summer months, that's when we—when our parents were at work, we would go to the playground and either play or play in the community center or play tennis. And I was—I began to think about these, you know, what he had said and think about some of the occurrences in my own life.

And I remember thinking about our tennis team, because here we were, a tennis team that was predominately black. And an instructor who came to teach us the finer points of the game—her name was Miss Sullivan. She came as a—I don't know if she was a volunteer or a worker who came through the Park Department. And she was a—I think she was either a student at the University of Washington or was recently graduated from there. But anyway, she taught us the finer points about tennis. And everybody loved Miss Sullivan; she was cute, too!

And that year, [clears throat] we had won all of our tournaments and had won the right to go play for the city championship. And the city championship was being held not fifteen-twenty blocks from our house, across the red line, which we didn't know existed, but down on the lake at the Seattle Tennis Club. And so, we got on our tennis whites and, you know, our little shirts

that said Madrona on it, and she got us down to the Tennis Club, and we were sitting in the cafeteria waiting for our turn to go out on the tennis court.

And in walked this tall black man in kitchen whites, and he looked at us black kids sitting there and he said, "What are you doing in here? You better get back there and get your clothes on and get to work!" Well, he thought we were the help, some hired help for maybe an event that they were having. And as it turned out, of course, [laughs] they didn't allow blacks in the Tennis Club. And, you know, we didn't know that. [Clears throat] So, we told him, "We're here to play tennis," and he thought we were joking.

We actually went out and beat the other team, which happened to be a white team. And the Tennis Club, along with like some Park Department officials—I can't believe they were Park Department officials that would have done this; they had to have been officials at the Seattle Tennis Club—left before giving us our trophies. They didn't have a trophy presentation. We were supposed to have a trophy presentation out on the court, and they left before and didn't give us our trophies. And it was because we were in their all-white tennis club.

And I remember thinking about that and thinking about, you know, a few other things that had occurred. My mother, when we moved here, and she had gone for an interview for a job she had found in the newspaper, and when she got there, they told her that the position was filled. And she said, "Well, I just saw it in the paper." And they said, "But, yeah, we've filled it since then," and she had called [0:35:00] down to see if it was still open. And so, she went back, and I don't know if she went to a phone booth or whatever, and she called them again. And said, "I'm inquiring about this position." And they said, "Oh, sure! Come down and we'd like you to apply."

DC: Right.

ED: I remembered hearing about, you know, hearing those things and observing these things. But all the while, you know, there were my friends who were white, the pastor at our church who was white. I had a good relationship with people. So, it wasn't about black and white. And I thought to myself, "I don't want to be white. I like who I am. But sometimes I maybe wish that I had [laughs] some of the things that they had." You see, my two white friends who lived on the other side of the red line, they lived in—the neighborhood *just two blocks away* was upscale. One of them, in fact, even had a maid, and their maid's name was Hazel. [Laughing] There used to be a 1960s TV show, "Hazel."

DC: Yeah. [Laughter]

ED: You know, I wanted the things that they had, which were nicer than mine, but I didn't want to be white, I don't think. But that's kind of where the awareness of my own skin color and the fact that I needed to be prideful in it began. And, as I—

DC: So, Stokely's words kind of rattled around?

ED: Stokely's words rattled around. And so, my brother and I knew that we had to be involved. He had already become—this was now in the fall of '67. He had started at the University of Washington and was in the Black Student Union with perhaps one of the other people you may be interviewing, Larry Gossett.

And I was now a senior going into high school, and I had actually joined SNCC and was appointed the co-chair of the Seattle chapter of SNCC. And we would try to do some community organizing, but most of the organizing was around voter registration. That was one of the big things during the Civil Rights Movement was registering black people to vote because of the conditions in the South—you know, really kind of pushed this Civil Rights Movement across the

United States, and so we did some of the same things that they were doing, and one was voter registration.

But we felt like we didn't have much direction, and we were contemplating, you know, how can we make an impact? And I was politicized by then. I was aware of who I was, and I was becoming politically aware and standing up. And, in fact, I, along with four or five of my closest friends at Garfield, decided that we were going to have a Black Student Union at Garfield. And we were met with all kinds of opposition.

Of course, when we went to the principal with our idea, he said, "No, you can't have a Black Student Union. You don't need one. You have a Boys Club." Of course, "Boys" was a derogatory term back then, which, in fact, to the credit of one of my—he's deceased now—one of my classmates, who was student body president, got the name changed to the Garfield Men's Club. But we said, "Yeah, but that's for the whole student body. We need something to speak for the rights of black students." And he said, "No, we're not going to do that."

And [clears throat] so, we were adamant that we were going to have a Black Student Union. So, we did several kinds of things to agitate. I was in the—what they called the stage band and the jazz band. I had learned to play trumpet. All of us kids had picked up an instrument, but I probably was the—I was the one that stayed with mine the longest. I was in the marching band; I was the drum major of the band. I was in the concert band, both in junior high and in high school. And I was in, now, the elite band, which was the jazz band, and they called it the stage band because we got to play at the pep rallies.

And so, one of the things that I, as I became politicized, when the Pledge of Allegiance was, you know, said every morning, I wouldn't stand up for the Pledge of Allegiance. When we had to play at the pep rallies, to play the "Star-Spangled Banner" at the start of the pep rally, I

would sit down and play the "Star-Spangled Banner." I got kicked out of school on a couple of occasions because I wouldn't adhere to the rules. [0:40:00]

And on one morning, we decided, "Well, we're going to throw off this pep rally to gain recognition," and we did this chant, where I would start, and then they would echo in the stands. And it went something like, "Bing, bing, bang, bang, ungawa, Black Power," so people would echo what we said. And then, when we did that, the whole student body just erupted—everybody! Black students, white students, Asian—all of them—just erupted! And so, I got kicked out of school for that.

But then, so we decided—we were kind of putting the pressure on—we decided, "Well, we're going to call a boycott." And we told the principal, "If you don't give us a BSU, we're going to boycott classes." And he said, "Ah, yeah. Well, it'll only be you and your friends, and then we'll expel you again." And so, what he didn't realize was that for most of those white students, the Asian students, the Latino students, we'd all gone to school together from grade school on up, and these were—most of them were our friends. And so, when we—and plus, I was the drum major of the marching band. [Laughing] Everybody in school knew who I was.

And so, when we called the boycott, the only people who went to class were the honor students, and the hallway in Garfield filled up in front of the principal's office. No one was going to class. And the principal sent out his messenger, and they relented. We got a Black Student Union, and we were the first, actually the first high school Black Student Union on the West Coast.

And so, I was becoming more now kind of aware of not only my own self and having developing a political consciousness, but there were a few incidents that were kind of projecting me into a leadership role. And there were a couple of minor scrapes. You know, I had never been

arrested before. I remember coming back from a high school basketball game, at which I had played; I had my trumpet with me. And I went down to one of the local spots where teens gathered, which happened to be, in fact, in front of a rival high school, Franklin High School. And there was a—it was like a big riot going on. I had kind of landed in the middle of a riot.

And I didn't realize what was happening, but I got out anyway to see why, you know, police were throwing tear gas and dispersing kids. And there was this one black girl that I knew, Deborah Rodriguez, who was being pinned to the ground by two officers. And I was asking her, "Are you alright?" What's—you know, "Get your knee off her back!" And the next thing I knew, I was being whisked away, handcuffed and taken off to juvenile, and I was charged with inciting a riot [laughs] because I was speaking out, you know, against this young black woman being brutalized by these cops.

And when I went before the judge, you know, I wouldn't relent. But what he said was, "I'm not going to sentence you to any time, but I'd like you to write an essay on why you thought it was important to defend that young woman." And so, I did.

Around this same time, there was a few incidents happening at that high school, Franklin High School. There had been a fight between four students. And Franklin was almost as—about as diverse as Garfield. And this fight between two white students had nothing to do with race. But the two white students were sent back to class, and the two black students were expelled. There was a young black woman who showed up one day with an Afro. And the principal—she was sent to the principal's office and she was told to—she was expelled from school and told she could come back to school when she had an appropriate hairdo. And that was kind of the last straw.

And the students at Franklin, the black students there, wanted to organize and wanted, one, to get this young woman reinstated in school, and they wanted a Black Student Union. And, of course, they had gotten the same answer that we had gotten. So, they called Larry, who was at the UW, and called me at Garfield. And so, several of us at Garfield and the UW, including my brother, Aaron, came to Franklin, met with the students, and then we walked across the street and walked into the principal's office and took over the principal's office and had a sit-in his office and told him we were taking over his office until they [0:45:00] addressed these concerns and gave the students some representation through a Black Student Union.

They fled the office, and we ended up staying in the building overnight. The next morning, the phone rang. And, you know, we were doing business. We answered the phone, "Good morning, Franklin High School." You know? [Laughs] And it was the administration, and they said, "Look, you can have—we'll address these demands. You'll have—they'll get a BSU. Please leave our building." So, we left the building.

And it was about a week later. I was in my geometry class at Garfield. And the phone rang, and Mr. Naramore said that someone in the office wants you in the office, which wasn't unusual. I had been called to the office on a number of occasions. [Laughter] So, I stepped outside of the office, and in the hallway were two detectives, who read me my rights and handcuffed me and proceeded to escort me out of the school, and I was being arrested for unlawful assembly. And unbeknownst to me at the time, my brother Aaron, Larry Gossett, and several other leaders, both at the UW and at the two high schools, were being arrested almost simultaneously.

And within the hour—it had to be within the hour or so—King was assassinated. And one, we knew that they had gotten us off of the street because they wanted to get leaders,

potentially, that could cause, you know, some confusion for them off of the street. So, all of the leaders of the, you know, the radical leaders, they had gotten. The black radical leaders they had gotten and put us in jail. I was in juvenile because I was underage. And I remember being in juvenile and seeing—

DC: What did they charge you with?

ED: Unlawful assembly.

DC: Okay. From the Franklin—?

ED: From the Franklin incident. And I remember seeing the cities burning across the U.S. And James Brown was in D.C., and they had been trying to do a concert, and he was trying to tell people, you know, "Don't go out and burn your neighborhoods!" He was exhorting people not to riot and not to burn, but to no avail. People were mad.

And my parents, when they came to pick me up that evening, that night, to get me out of juvenile, they had realized that both of their sons were in jail now, their two older sons. And when they picked me up, the only thing they said to me was, "Are you alright?" And then, we drove home in silence. And, you know, the feeling was palpable, you know, in terms of them being distraught over the assassination of King, on the one hand, and the fact that their two sons were in jail that same day, it was as if they knew something was going to change in their lives and in their sons' lives.

DC: Do you remember talking with them about—I mean, you're talking about how your own consciousness is—did they—were they moving along with you? Or did you talk with them about your consciousness developing at this point?

ED: No. You see, I—the whole cross-cultural experience—[mike glitch]

DC: Oops.

JB: Oops.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

DC: ...whether you were having these conversations with your folks.

ED: Yeah, well, the whole cross-cultural experience, I think, was kind of an unspoken thing. I think they had put us in the environment, and so—and as I said, I wasn't aware of—I thought that's the way life was supposed to be. And so, I wasn't aware of what its impact was on me growing up. I think the—when I was becoming aware, I don't remember having the conversation with them.

You know, I think that, like I said, when we went and marched with King, and my father said, you know, "We're going to go to this march," and we thought that was important because he said it was. And we knew that we had seen stuff on TV, and they had talked—we had talked about probably the Pettus, you know, the Bloody Sunday, and the bombing of the kids, you know, the church, and we had talked about those kind of things. But in terms of my own personal—you know, it wasn't like they were directing me and observing this progression. These were things that were happening internal. [0:50:00]

And so, you know, I didn't discuss—they obviously were aware when I was arrested [laughs] the first time for inciting a riot. And I had been interviewed by a newspaper—in fact, I'll show you the clip here after we're done—when I was seventeen, right in the middle of that, and you can see my Afro, I had the SNCC jacket on, and they were asking me about the Vietnam War.

And my words to them—was they were asking if I thought it was a war worth fighting in. And my response—and they had asked several students, and I was one of several students that they put in this newspaper article—that World War II was something where people were fighting

for something that was a worthy cause. We knew why we were in it; we knew that we were defending ourselves after Pearl Harbor was bombed.

While I didn't really fully understand the full implications of what the Japanese were faced with and this whole imperialist thing, I wasn't fully aware and abreast of that, but I knew that from my father's fighting in the war and showing his patriotic response that that was a natural patriotic response. But that here we were fighting an alleged enemy 15,000 miles away from the United States that had never attacked us and had never shown any aggression towards the United States. And so, my response was that, "No, this is not something that I think that people should be fighting for."

And so, I was—these were things that—and my parents saw the article in the newspaper, so they knew I—they had to know that I was developing a political consciousness. And I'm sure that I probably mouthed off some things, but I don't remember sitting down and having this conversation. But it was at this point where things were—they knew that some sort of development was happening with their sons, because we were both arrested on the same day that King was assassinated in association with this event at Franklin High School.

And it was about [clears throat] a week later, because we were already, Aaron and I and a group of people from Seattle, BSU students, were already lined up to go to the West Coast conference [clears throat] for black student unions in San Francisco at San Francisco State University. And Aaron and I had been talking much more about political organizing, and we actually had gotten ahold of a paper, a Black Panther newspaper. And so we were aware that the Black Panther Party existed and had some rough idea of who they were, [coughs] but we didn't fully understand what they represented. But we knew that they were like a—developing into a

powerful voice, at least in California, because the Black Panther Party started in 1966. It was not a national organization in ’67 or ’68, not yet.

And here we were in the spring of 1968 and we traveled to San Francisco. [Coughs] And we had gotten wind that the day before Martin Luther King was assassinated, a young Black Panther by the name of Bobby Hutton had been assassinated and shot by Oakland police, and they were having his funeral that weekend. And a few of us said, “Well, we’re going over to show our support.”

And that Saturday, we left the conference early and drove across the Bay Bridge into West Oakland. And I remember—I can still see the scene vividly in my mind today—when we got down on the street level in West Oakland, you started seeing large groups of black people gathering. Some of them—there was one big gathering in a park or in some area. You had Panthers, both men and women, in leather jackets and berets, lined up in like platoon formation. And I remember seeing that and thinking, “My God, this looks like a black army!”

And we had to get out, of course, blocks away from the church in order to find parking. And we were walking through, you know, this scene, and everybody had on leather jackets and berets and black slacks. [0:55:00] And I remember seeing a group of people talking off to one side, and there were whites in this group, and one of them was Marlon Brando. I recognized Marlon Brando. He was talking to who I would later find out was Bobby Seale. And when they—

DC: Can you remember your—I’m sorry to interrupt, but—your reaction to seeing what you described as a black army? What was it like to see—?

ED: It was overwhelming. It was both—you know, it was kind of like a culmination of this discovering who I was as a young black man and developing a consciousness and an

identity, but seeing a group that looked organized and ready to defend their community. It was very stark contrast to the images that I saw on TV, with the singing demonstrators walking arm-in-arm, you know, singing "We Shall Overcome." Because it—this looked like someone, a group of revolutionaries, who weren't talking about "we shall overcome." They looked like they were ready to take what was rightfully theirs, in terms of their human dignity and their rights and protect their community, and so, it was a sense of pride, of defiance. It was almost an overwhelming sense of, you know, "This is where I belong. This is who I am."

And when we got inside the church to view the body of Bobby Hutton, when we stepped into the church, lining the walls all the way around were young black men and women in Afros and berets and shotguns and bandoliers. And the casket was draped in a Black Panther flag. And all of these images were like—it was just a—it was a shock, you know. And I remember walking by the coffin, and I had heard that, you know, in conversation on the way there, that Bobby Hutton had been hit by thirty police bullets. And the reason why Mrs. Hutton, Bobby's mother, wanted the coffin to be open is so people could see what the police had done to her son.

And I remember when I was filing by Bobby's, Little Bobby's, coffin and seeing him in there—he was seventeen years old, and I was seventeen years old—and I remember thinking that, you know, that could be me laying there. And I think that was the moment for me where I said, "That's it. This is who I am, and there is no turning back."

And people often ask me about that era in my life and that period, and they ask me if I was afraid. There was never any fear. I wasn't afraid to—I can't speak for other people, but there was never a fear about putting my life on the line or giving my life to the revolution, so to speak. It was a defiance and an indignant response to the racism and the racist brutality that the power structure in the United States had inflicted upon not only black people, but people that didn't

have means, whether they were poor whites, whether it be Native Americans, whether it be farmworkers, you know, immigrant populations, anyone who was different from the status quo. It was like this immense indignant response to this overwhelming oppression and dehumanizing of a people. And so, that all kind of gelled for me in that moment, and I'm sure for many of us.

As we headed back to the conference, we knew that Bobby Seale was scheduled to speak that night at the BSU conference. And we waited for him to speak, and he showed up with his bodyguards and several Panthers. And he gave probably the most fiery speech that I had ever heard. And after his speech, you were either afraid, because it was like a line was being drawn in the sand, or you were destined to become a Panther and a revolutionary. [1:00:00] A line was clearly drawn.

And so, a small group of us—Aaron, myself, two or three others—not the whole contingent that came from Seattle, but a few of us went over and cornered Bobby and said, "We want to start a chapter of the Black Panther Party in Seattle." And he told us to go ahead and finish this conference and return to Seattle, and that within two weeks he would be there and he would outline for us what we needed to do to organize the chapter. And we set that up, when his arrival would be, and the day that he came there were probably fifty potential Panthers in my parents' home.

DC: How did you put the word out?

ED: It went out through the grapevine. You know, the community has a grapevine. And, you know, fifty was a small core group at that time. And when my parents came home from work, all these bodies were laying on the floor and listening to Bobby talk. And they just came in, stepped over everyone, you know, stepped around and over, and went straight back into the

kitchen, which was usually the gathering place, closed the door and left us alone. See, they knew something was coming, and this was the something.

And we organized the chapter. Aaron, my brother, was given the leadership. He was the defense captain, I was field lieutenant, and we had a few other positions in there. And that began the journey. We were the first chapter to be organized outside of the state of California. And from that beginning, the chapters of the Black Panther Party spread like wildfire across the United States until we had a chapter in just about every one of the contiguous forty-eight states.

DC: What did—I'm curious what Bobby Seale said to you it meant to be a Panther and whether that changed for you over time.

ED: Well, it was pretty clear to us early on as we were trying to figure out, you know, how we were going to organize and, of course, it had to evolve. But it was clear to us, for most of us, that we were committed, we were in a lifelong struggle. He ran down the Ten-Point Program of the Black Panther Party.

DC: Can you just tell us what that is, the Ten-Point Program?

ED: Can you pause for one second?

JB: Sure.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

ED: [Laughing] It's a long time ago when I think about it. I've been married to my wife over forty years. Are we back on?

JB: We are.

ED: The interesting thing is that—you know, you were talking about what it meant to be a member of the Black Panther Party. [Clears throat] And most of us who were younger than twenty at the time, because I was seventeen. My brother would have been nineteen. He's about a

year and six months older than me. And many of us were around that age group, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, seventeen. Most of us who were serious, we either knew that we would be dead before we were twenty-five, and those of us that accepted that reality didn't care. Those that looked at it and knew that if they stayed in the Party they would be dead by twenty-five, they probably were out of the organization within six months because they weren't willing to go to that extent. And so, what it meant was you had to be willing. You had to know what it meant to be a Panther, the fact that you would be probably in the line of fire now.

Because it was in 1968, that very year, that J. Edgar Hoover claimed that the Black Panther Party was the number one threat to the internal security of the United States. That's a pretty strong designation. That's how they talk about Al-Qaeda today. So, if you put that in retrospect to 1968, and the Party being named the number one threat to the internal security of the United States, that meant we had a bullseye on us. And so, it was important for us to understand what it meant to be a Panther, as you said, how did Bobby communicate that?

Because in [1:05:00] the early days of the Black Panther Party, and I presume that you will end up interviewing Bobby Seale for this program, the Party had organized around a couple of basic principles. One was that people had a right to live [clears throat] a life and pursue the American dream without being shot and killed and brutalized in their communities. And we didn't organize around civil rights, but we organized around what we believed were God-given rights, and the right to humanity and dignity was one of them.

And when Huey and Bobby decided that they were going to form the Black Panther Party, they took the name from another organization that had the panther as a symbol. They were the Lowndes County Freedom Association, and they had the symbol of the black panther because the black panther by nature is a defensive animal, [clears throat] not an aggressor. So,

we didn't [clears throat] form initially to be the aggressor, but to take a defensive posture. And, in fact, the first name of the Black Panther Party was the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense.

And so, what had happened during those early years in '66 and '67, the first program that the Panther Party organized—we called them Survival Programs—was the Police Alert Patrol, because that was an immediate need in black communities across the United States, was to end the racist brutality by cops committed against black people, which is one of the points in the Ten-Point Program. And I'll talk about the Ten-Point Program in a minute. [Clears throat]

But when—in order to get that point across, Huey used to teach us that power is the ability to define phenomena and make it act in a desired manner. And when they define that phenomena, the racist brutality in black communities—and Oakland and L.A. have historical, have a track record of historical racism and brutal treatment of black and Latino people. And in Oakland in the '50s and '60s, you know, it was routine for a black man to get shot, or a black woman to get shot, by police over minor incidents, a traffic incident or something, you know, where cops would just unleash their brutality.

And so, when Huey and Bobby were first organizing the party, one, they armed themselves with the law. They understood that the—it's interesting that there's this gun debate going on now. [Clears throat] And, of course, this was at a time when there wasn't a proliferation of guns in communities, let alone among kids and gangs now today. But when we were upholding the constitutional right to own and bear arms, [laughing] the gun lobby today, the NRA, opposed Panthers owning guns. It's not surprising that, of course, they've done a 360 now today and they want all the guns they can get.

But at that time, we knew that we had the Constitution on our side, Huey and Bobby did. They also studied the California penal code and understood that legally that they had the right to

carry arms and they had the right to observe police carrying out their duty. So, they put those two together. They had also—one of the readings that they often read was the "Red Book" by Chairman Mao Tse Tung about revolutionary theory and practitioning.

And so, when they organized the first program, the Police Alert Patrol, when they marched out on that street and faced down those cops [clears throat] on a Saturday night in Oakland, with six or seven Panthers with shotguns armed on the corner, telling them they weren't going to brutalize that young man, that was really kind of the birth of the Panther mystique and the creation of the myth, if you will.

Huey became almost a mythical figure from this, and he was the one who led this incident. When the police officer told him, "What are [you] doing with that gun, nigger? Give me that gun!" And Huey jacked around and threw the chamber of his shotgun and said, "This is my weapon. I have a right to carry this weapon. If you attempt to take it away from me, I'm going to defend myself." And it was that moment that really captured the imagination of those people in Oakland. [1:10:00]

And so, the downside to that was—was that, because we were called the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, people began to see the Party as their own community defense force. So, that meant, "Go get the Panthers to do this," or "Go get the Panthers to do that." And that was not what we were about. We were setting the example that you had the right to defend yourself and your community, and not have to take people brutalizing you unnecessarily, illegally, unlawfully, through racist attack. But you have the right to stand up and defend yourself and stand up like a man. And that was the message that we were sending, that the Party was sending very early.

Well, that's initially what put the bullseye on our backs, but as long as it was a localized organization in California, they didn't get a lot of attention. The FBI probably thought that that would go away. But when this migration happened, and we were the first chapter, as I said, outside of the state of California, it became clear that this was going to be something that they were going to have to deal with.

So, the Ten-Point Platform and Program really was about the basic needs of people within our community. I don't know if I can read all of this, but it talked about what we want and what we believe, and I can summarize what the points were. We wanted an end to the racist brutality of police within our community. We wanted an education that represented the true nature of black people. We wanted an end to the robbery of our communities by what we called then the avaricious businessman who took resources out of the community and never gave anything back. We wanted health care, food, land, housing, education, justice and peace, to kind of summarize it all together. We wanted black men exempt from serving in military service. We wanted an end to all-white juries trying blacks in the court when, in fact, they are guaranteed by the Constitution to have a jury of their peers. Those were the elements of the Ten-Point Program.

And so, when he kind of broke that down to us, it really established what we were about, that these were the things that we were going to pursue. And it was going to take a lot of organizing. We had to—because we had a bullseye on our back, we had to—every Panther had their own two guns and a thousand rounds of ammunition. And be prepared to defend yourself because you would be under attack. We had to read two hours a day to educate ourselves and understand the concepts and theories of revolution and what it meant to be an organizer and a leader.

And so, we were basically preparing ourselves in those early years to become full-blooded revolutionaries that stood for something and that had a revolutionary philosophy and developed whatever the tools that we needed to become revolutionary practitioners. And this meant that we had to basically—we were giving our lives to this. And when the reality set in of the seriousness of it—see, we had the same kind of phenomenon that happened in Oakland happened here in Seattle. When Bobby Hutton was murdered in Seattle [Oakland], you know, a thousand people in the community joined the Black Panther Party overnight. It just exploded overnight.

When we began to organize here in Seattle, within a couple of weeks, we had four hundred, five hundred Panthers that we were trying to organize and get into some sort of a disciplined structure. And a lot of people joined the Panthers, the Party, because it was kind of the—the "in" thing to do is not the right word, but it was a source of pride and a source of belonging, a source of identity. You know, this was during the turbulent '60s, and people wanted direction.

But most people didn't really understand what it meant to create a revolutionary movement. You know, a lot of people in the black community across the country were used to spontaneous rebellions, [1:15:00] and our movement wasn't about a spontaneous rebellion. We were trying to build a political power structure that could challenge the status quo here in the United States. And we had to set out and build coalitions and gather resources and we had to know what it was that we were doing, and that took time and effort and commitment. And when it was clear—

DC: And discipline. [Laughs]

ED: And discipline. And when it was clear that this is what it was going to take, you know, talking about reading two hours a day [laughs]. I remember when I first picked up *Wretched of the Earth* written by Franz Fanon, I thought, "My God! How do I understand this?" But, you know, so we had political education classes every day, not every day, but weekly, where we would talk about what we read so we could get an understanding of what other revolutionary movements were about. And we began to realize that it was going to take effort in order to build this coalition and build this foundation.

And so, within six to twelve months, most of those Panthers that came that first few weeks were gone, which was probably the best, because we boiled down to a hardcore group of Panthers, probably about twenty, that we knew that we could count on, not just for the glory. Because, see, in those—that first summer, we buried, I think two, maybe three Panthers here in Seattle. One of them, I think, it was either Butch Armstead's or Henry Boyer's funeral—I think it was Henry Boyer's funeral—was the largest, at the time, the largest funeral in the state. Thousands of people attended, and the Panthers—we were all out in our leather jackets and berets and powder-blue shirts and lining the streets, you know, in front of the, you know, the mortuary.

But so, you know, like, of course—guys had put on this uniform, and even women, you know—but the guys, you know, it was like this macho thing. It was a source of pride, but it was also a kind of, "Ooo, I'm a Panther!" And when we had to kind of create this disciplined organization, it wasn't about just wearing the uniform and walking down the street and getting girls because you had a Panther uniform on. Yeah, we ended up—we expelled a lot of people, a lot of people left on their own, and we drilled down to this hardcore group of Panthers that were

committed, and we began the process of political organization and kind of building this trust in the community. We started the—

DC: What was that—if you could talk a little bit about—

JB: [1:18:08]

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Okay, we're back.

DC: I was going to ask about, you know, that difficult process—I would imagine a difficult process—of boiling down and the expulsions and the infighting. What was that like, since you *were* trying to do something for yourself, for your community, to experience that, those kind of difficulties?

ED: I think we understood that that was going to be a natural part of the process. Anytime when you are organizing something that is so involved and demanding of you as an individual, you know that there's going to be people that are not going to be able to adapt to that kind of structure. It takes a certain person to be able to kind of give of themselves completely and kind of fall into this disciplined body, this disciplined organization. We were like a small army. And so, it required that we—that you kind of gave of yourself.

It wasn't like some organizations that are like where you have this hierarchy and there's this submission. It wasn't like that at all. It was more like a family. And you had to have this close-knit family, but to kind of go through the growing pains, to kind of get to that point, we realized it was going to be tough, and it was tough as we went through it.

But, you know, I think that we understood—there was a core of us that understood what the Party meant and what it stood for, and so we were going to do whatever it took to make sure that we had, we came away with something that was going to be meaningful and make a

difference and have an impact, because we were putting our lives out there on the line. Just because we began to do this community organizing didn't take the bullseye off our back; it increased it. In fact, we were—a memo was sent out [1:20:00] from our headquarters that said that leadership had to have two bodyguards—I had two bodyguards when I was seventeen and eighteen years old—because we understood the seriousness of it. And so—

DC: Did you move out on your own at that point, or were you living at home?

ED: I left that summer and moved out on my own. In fact, I left probably, you know, that was in April of '68. I graduated from Garfield in June of '68. By the end of June, I was out in my own apartment. And Aaron was already out. And it was—you know, in those early days, when I was still at my parents' house, my bodyguard would come home with me at night and sit on my front porch. And I'd wake up in the morning, and he's still sitting there. And, you know, I told him, "You can go home. I can take care of myself."

But my parents would get calls in the middle of the night. My mother would answer the phone, and somebody would say, "We're going to kill that nigger son of yours tonight." And she would say, "Go ahead and try," because she knew that I could take care of myself and she knew Aaron could take of himself and she knew that we also had people that were standing at our side. And those were some of the things that my parents went through early on in those years.

My father was visited at his job by the FBI. You asked me earlier about him having to navigate Boeing. I don't remember—like I said, I don't think he had to navigate Boeing so much. They were glad to have him. But it was when we became politicized that the FBI's interest piqued up. Here he is, working on—you know, in a manufacturing plant that had government contracts. And so, he caught some heat behind that.

But, you know, going through these growing pains, yes, it was painful, but at the same time, we knew it was necessary for us in order to evolve to where we wanted to. When we started our first free breakfast program in a church around the corner from my parents' home, it was a church that I had been a member of the Boy Scouts in, and the pastor quite naturally said, "Yes," while other churches turned us down. This was a white pastor who said, "Yes." Black churches told us, "No." This white pastor told us, "Yes." It was because of that relationship that we had.

And we realized—and we had members of the Party who—we had a Japanese Panther here, a couple of Japanese Panthers here in Seattle. And, while whites could not join the organization, our lawyers were considered kind of an extension of who we were, and we had several white lawyers that were defending us in court.

And when you began to realize and understand the philosophy of the Black Panther Party, I remember three chapters in the Black Panther Party became targets immediately in 1968. When J. Edgar Hoover put out the memo to "destroy, disrupt, and discredit the Black Panther Party by any means necessary," out to his field offices, they targeted three offices that they wanted to shut down. In fact, in the memo he said, "Prevent the rise of a Black Messiah." And the three offices that he targeted were Los Angeles, Chicago, and Seattle.

[Clears throat] They already had the bullseye on national headquarters in Oakland, and they had already got—Huey was in jail at the time, so they had already effectively pulled who they thought was the primary leader of the Party out of the Party, and Huey was locked up as a result of a gun battle he had with police where he was supposed to be killed. But he—he was shot, but he ended up killing one police officer and wounding the other. And [clears throat] so, they had him off the street.

But L.A., Chicago, and Seattle were problematic for the FBI, in their eyes, because in Los Angeles, you had the leader of the Black Panther Party there, Bunchy Carter, who was the former head of the largest gang in Los Angeles, the Slausons. They had five thousand members strong. [Coughs] To have him as head of the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panther Party and organizing, you know, five thousand gang members, let alone a truce between the other gangs, was very problematic for the FBI.

In Chicago, you had the same thing, where Fred Hampton was organizing [1:25:00] not only the black gangs in Chicago, the Disciples, the Blackstone Rangers, but also—you know, getting a truce between them—but also organizing young whites and young Latinos. And in Seattle, we had this broad coalition of Asians, of Latinos, of whites, and so that—and plus, here we were a little spot in the Northwest. A lot of people didn't even know where Seattle was. [Laughs] But if we had a major impact, then I guess that would have been problematic for them.

So, they targeted those three offices with the idea of assassinating the leaders in those three chapters. Bunchy Carter was assassinated in Oakland—excuse me, in Los Angeles. Fred Hampton—you're probably aware of his assassination in Chicago. And they had several attempts on Aaron and my life here in Seattle.

On one such attempt, Aaron—I used to run the target practice for Panthers once a weekend out at a target range that we had set up. And on one particular Saturday, I didn't go out with Aaron to the target range, and Aaron had gone out with a group of Panthers. And as he prepared to fire his shotgun, he at first was going to fire it from his shoulder, but then he decided at the last minute he was going to try hip fire and brought it down to his hip. And the shotgun exploded, and it tore into his arm; he almost lost his arm. Of course, had he fired it from his

shoulder, he would have blown his head off. And we knew that someone had doctored with his ammunition. And there were other attempts on his and my life in those years.

But [clears throat] something that Fred Hampton said in '68 at a large rally—and, in fact, there's a video out about Fred Hampton and his death, and this speech is on there, where he says that—he's talking to this large group on the South Side of Chicago—as a matter of fact, he's on the West Side of Chicago in a church. And there's white students in there, there's Latino students in there, probably Asian, a lot of black people in there.

And what he said to them was that, "The reason why we say, 'All power to the people,' what we mean when we say, 'All power to the people,' is that we mean that [clears throat] there should be white power for white people, brown power for brown people, yellow power for yellow people, red power for red people, and black power for black people—all power to the people! And what we need is a Rainbow Coalition." And *he* coined that phrase, not Jesse Jackson. It came out of Fred Hampton's mouth first.

And so, we had *always*, from the beginning—that was in 1968—we had a philosophy around what we called "revolutionary inter-communalism." And so, we had branches of the Black Panther Party in Australia, in Denmark, in Sweden, in Japan, in Germany. And so, we had coalitions here in the United States with the Peace and Freedom Party; the SDS; the Young Lords, a Puerto Rican group; the Red Guard; the AIM, the American Indian Movement. We had coalitions with all of these organizations. And while we would discourage them from trying to join the Black Panther Party, we encouraged them to organize within their own communities. So, we had this natural network and coalition that was really about a multicultural foundation to the Black Panther Party. And most people don't realize that that don't know the history of the Black Panther Party.

And so, when I did that speech in France a few years ago on "From Revolutionary to Interculturalist," we had always been interculturalists in the Black Panther Party, but my upbringing had always been multicultural, so it was like a full circle. It's been a full circle in my life. [Coughs] And for me, personally, that began with the influences of my parents and where they had positioned us.

So, we went on to organize the chapter. We ended up with five breakfast programs, where we fed over two thousand kids a hot meal every morning before they went to school. And our breakfast programs were strategically located in housing projects around the city: four of the housing projects, *all* four of the housing projects—Yesler Terrace, Holly Park, High Point, and Rainier Vista—and then one at the Atlantic Street Center [1:30:00], which had a more central location.

We moved it out of the church and into—and oddly enough, the Atlantic Street Center was the first, the *very* first neighborhood community center that we hung out in when we moved here from Chicago in 1957, the very first one. And the head of that organization at the time was a gentleman by the name of Ike Ikeda. And Ike knew us when we were kids, and when we went down there to ask him if we could have the breakfast program there, it was a natural response, "Of course."

And so, it was that kind of coalition that we had across the city in all of these different neighborhoods. We had white liberals, wealthy, some white wealthy liberals that were supporters of ours in those early years, and continued to support us throughout the years, and even after the Party went away when we've done various events. But that foundation, that coalition that we built, sustained us through those years because when the chapter shrunk down to a core number of people, we were probably more effective than we would have been with this large group,

because we utilized the networks and the coalitions to host things and to get our word out and to build our programs.

In fact, when [clears throat] during the peace marches, the antiwar demonstrations, there was a doctor by the name of John Green, who was a neurologist at the University of Washington Medical School, who would—he had put together a band of medical students and a medical detail that followed the demonstrators who were marching. And on the front lines, when someone got billy-clubbed or tear-gassed, they would bring them to the back of these huge marches, and they would be administered health care.

Well, we approached John about a free medical clinic, and he was all gung-ho and told us how to—you know, what we needed. And in our first—it's actually our second headquarters, because the first headquarters, the real headquarters—we had an office prior to there, but probably one of our most notorious headquarters was up on 34th and Union, which ironically was around the corner from my parents' house [laughter] right there in Madrona. And the building is still there. But that was the first kind of notorious Panther office.

But when we moved out of there in 1969, the fall of 1969, it was because of the attacks that were happening on Party offices around the country. And so, we were ordered into not only more secure offices, but barracks. So, the building that we got was a duplex. Downstairs was the—our offices, and upstairs were the Panther barracks. And we had, eventually, two or three of those kind of buildings around the city, around the central area.

And so, our primary building was there on 20th and Spruce. And, in fact, the People's Wall—we had an artist paint a wall around the building, which is still there. I don't know—you may want to go film that before you leave. It's on the corner of 20th and Spruce. We had it refurbished about five years ago on our fortieth anniversary. But that was the office where we

began to fortify the office. We had sandbags on all of the walls. We had bunkers inside for—gun bunkers. We had steel and plyboard sandwiches on the window.

And that was the first site of our medical clinic. And Dr. Green set up the clinic in the back of the office, and he appropriated what we needed from the University of Washington. [Laughter] He told us to back a truck up to the hospital. He put in exam tables and medicine cabinets, you know, for the medications and equipment that he needed. He just loaded us up. And we established our first clinic there. He went, actually, on to open four other neighborhood clinics in the Seattle area, assist with opening those clinics. So, our first free clinic was there, put together by John Green.

But the patients, when they came into the clinic—[1:35:00] and our first service was a Well Baby Clinic for young mothers to address the—the infant mortality rate was very high among, in the black community in those years, and so, that was our first concentration. And when the pregnant mothers would come in, they would walk by, of course, the officer of the day. That was the office when you came in through this door that was about this thick, and it was always guarded with an armed guard. They would walk in, and then by the sandbags and along the bunker, and then back into the medical clinic to get their medical care. And, you know, people always said they felt secure when they walked in there, [laughs] you know.

DC: [Laughing] Right.

ED: It wasn't like they were fearful of these sandbags. But they knew who we were, they knew that we were offering a free medical clinic, and people came. And that was the birth of our first free medical clinic. And, by the way, the Panther clinic is still operating today, the Carolyn Downs Family Medical Center. Carolyn was a young woman who worked with us in the '70s

and died when she was—before she was thirty, I believe, in 1978. We were no longer the chapter by then, but we continued the efforts of the organization.

So, we probably had over thirty programs that we had organized, both here and around the country, the other chapters and branches. You know, we had the free bussing to prisons program. We had a free food program, which was some of first free food banks here in the area. We had a free shoe program, a free legal aid program, a free bussing to prisons program—I may have said that—senior aid, legal aid, and then our Summer Liberation School, which was the foundation for creating what they did at central headquarters in Oakland, the Oakland Community Learning Center.

My brother, Aaron, was transferred out of the chapter, as was—the whole chapter was transferred out of Seattle in 1971. And I was serving time in a prison in Oregon for allegedly stealing a leather coat when I was down speaking on the campus at Oregon, the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon. And I spent fourteen months in prison in Salem, Oregon, as a political prisoner.

And my—I remember that my—hearing about some of the efforts that were going on when I was locked up. My parents—my father and my brother had organized a meeting with the governor of Oregon at the time, who was a very progressive and liberal governor, Governor McCall. And they had arranged for a clemency hearing. And [clears throat] I didn't know, you know, really how to respond to that, [laughs] because, you know, I was a dyed-in-the-wool revolutionary at that point, and any concession was not within my power to give, nor was I going to give it and appear to be in collaboration with, quote-unquote, "the enemy."

I had been subpoenaed, before I was locked up in 1970, before the House Un-American Activities Committee. And the reason why they subpoenaed me was because when they sent

their congressional investigator out to find cooperative witnesses, Aaron instructed me to talk to the investigator. And he asked me, one of the things he asked me was, "Why do you feed kids a hot breakfast?" And I said, "You know, [laughs] look, how are you going to ask kids to go to school that are hungry and ask them to learn in a classroom where they're comparing apples—you know, two apples plus four apples equals six apples? And you don't expect their stomach to grumble? How are they going to focus and concentrate? You know, it makes sense to give them a nutritional breakfast."

And so, when I explained our programs to him, you know, why the free medical clinic, etcetera, so he took that to mean that I was a cooperative witness. But I was basically instructed to explain to him why we had these programs. And so, when I was subpoenaed, you know, I was told that, "If you get in there, you know, this is the *House Un-American Activities Committee*." [Laughter] So, I knew that—my lawyers instructed us that, you know, you can answer—instructed me that I could answer my name and where I lived and what my occupation was. Anything after that would compel you to answer. [Coughs] [1:40:00]

So, after I gave them those three things, I told them—the very next question was, "Are you a member of the Black Panther Party?" And I said, "I refuse to answer on the grounds of self-incrimination. I take the Fifth Amendment." And with each question, they grew more and more angry. It's kind of like Nikita Khrushchev bouncing his shoe on the table. They were just so infuriated that they had flown me all the way to D.C., and I wasn't a cooperative witness. And so, I knew that we were on one side, and the government was on the other.

So, while I was in prison in '71, Attica erupted. And George Jackson, who was a member of the Black Panther Party, was murdered in San Quentin. And after Attica, the captain of the prison called me and another Panther who was from the Portland chapter—Williams, Red

Williams—called the two of us into the office, his office, and told us that if anything broke out in their prison, they were going to shoot us first. And so, we knew that we were still, even in prison, you know, the targets.

DC: Um-hmm.

ED: And so, when the governor's office came to the prison, and the investigator said he was there for a clemency hearing, to pursue clemency, that the governor wanted to pursue clemency, my response to him was, "The only thing that I'll—you tell the governor that the only thing that I'll accept from him is an unconditional surrender." And [laughing] the guy was like—

DC: [Laughing] "Who is this guy?"

ED: [Laughing] "Who is this guy? We're trying to get you *out* of prison!" But I didn't want to get out under those circumstances. And so, while I was there, the chapter was literally closed in Seattle. Everybody was transferred to Oakland.

DC: Were you organizing while you were incarcerated?

ED: Oh, yeah. Well, there were at least three other Panthers in that prison. They were Oregon Panthers and myself. And, you know, we had to do subtle things around organizing. We would meet. We would hold political education classes. There wasn't much more we could do other than keep ourselves abreast of what was going on, you know, and being aware of and not letting someone get taken advantage of in the prison, protect ourselves while we were in prison. [Clears throat] And so, it wasn't the same kind, level of organizing we would obviously do on the outside.

You know, the Oregon prisons are not what you would find in like a California prison, obviously, where political organizing—it was a hotbed of—there was a need to do that kind of political organizing in San Quentin or in Soledad. Oregon prison, you know, it was not nearly the

platform for that kind of thing. So, we could keep ourselves abreast of what was going on, but there wasn't a need for this kind of broad organization. There weren't like gang warfares inside prisons, you know, that kind of thing, which George Jackson was beginning to form a coalition between—he organized the Latino prisoners and the black prisoners in San Quentin and Soledad, but we didn't have that opportunity in the prison that I was in. So, it was much more low-key in that way.

But, by the time I got out—I was paroled in late '72—the chapter—there was a group of community workers that were still there. They had moved into a new building. The old office with all the sandbags was gone. And you could see kind of the shift in the era, from those early years in the Party to now, just a few short years later, where the sandbags were gone, you know. We weren't sleeping with guns underneath our pillows, you know. It was a very different time, but we still went about the business of organizing the community. And that meant through organizing our survival programs. And so, the clinic was now in another building in the offices that we had now. No one, while we did have a 24-hour guard—someone had to be at the building twenty-four hours at all times—no one, you know, lived there.

DC: Can I ask you about—?

JB: [1:44:35]

[Recording stops and then resumes]

DC: [Laughs]

JB: Okay, we're back.

DC: Well, I was going to ask you about, because there's the famous sort of split, right, as it's sometimes called, within the Panthers about: Do we continue this sort of militarism and the guerrilla revolution—?

ED: Yes, yeah.

DC: Or focus on survival programs and meeting the basic needs of black people?

ED: Yeah, yeah.

DC: But it sounds like—your description of what happened in Seattle—there's still [1:45:00] kind of a mix of the two, or how did you see it playing out?

ED: Well, there *was* that mix of the two. There was that mix of the two probably in every chapter. We had that kind of mini-split, if you will, in our chapter early on in probably early 1969. And there was—in fact, he was our brother-in-law, who had more of a military, you know, "let's do it now" kind of a mentality and did some things that were—engaged in some things that were kind of contrary to what we were about and what we considered to be, you know, like sensationalizing, you know, sensationalism.

And so, there was that ideological split here in Seattle, but they faded quickly. In fact, several of them went to prison for a bank robbery. Others kind of just faded into the—it's a little more involved. I'm not going to name names, but that split occurred, and we maintained control of the organization and continued to build the structure that Huey and Bobby wanted in the first place.

The big ideological split on the national level was really perpetuated by informants and the FBI through COINTELPRO. COINTELPRO wasn't just about assassinating leaders, because they could only get so close and they would only have so many opportunities. You know, they blew a couple of opportunities here in Seattle. They weren't going to get that opportunity again.

DC: Can you define what that is, just for—?

ED: What—the opportunities?

DC: No, the COINTELPRO.

ED: COINTELPRO was a program actually put together by J. Edgar Hoover way back in the ’30s, ’20s and ’30s, when he was consumed with the idea that the Communists wanted to take over the United States and the Communist threat. And [clears throat] so, COINTELPRO was an acronym for Counter Intelligence Program. So, he began this relentless spying and eventually phone-tapping, [coughs] and it was active all through the union-busting years in the ’40s, breaking up the unions, during the McCarthy era when they went on the witch hunt and blacklisted top actors from Hollywood, on into the Civil Rights Movement, when they wiretapped Martin Luther King and wiretapped the Kennedys.

And so, it kind of evolved into—when the Party emerged, it was the new threat that they saw as a bigger threat even than King. And so, all of its—the COINTELPRO’s energies now were directed towards revolutionary movements across the United States, and the Panthers were at the top of the list. That’s why he declared the Party the number one threat to the internal security of the United States in 1968. And his infamous memo, which came out through the Freedom of Information Act, said “destroy, discredit, disrupt the activities of the Black Panther Party by any means necessary and prevent the rise of a Black Messiah.” [Clears throat.] Those were his words, and that was what COINTELPRO was focused on in those ’60s and ’70s.

And so, part of their effort, if they couldn’t assassinate us, because we were armed in our headquarters—I remember when they attacked the L.A. office and they tried to run kids out of the L.A. breakfast program by storming the breakfast program and scaring the kids to death, but the community members would come back out and say, “No, we’re not going to be afraid of this. We’re going to continue to allow these breakfast programs to happen.”

We used to have a—one of our theories was “Use what you’ve got to get what you need,” which meant use the resources at your disposal, and most of our breakfast programs, while we

organized them and cooked in them, were eventually taken over by mothers that didn't have jobs who would cook and run the breakfast program centers. [1:50:00] So, they weren't going to be bullied in that way.

So, when they decided to attack the L.A. office—the L.A. Panthers had several members who were ex-Vietnam vets, combat vets, who had fortified the office and had created a network of ditches and tunnels when you came into the office. And the very first SWAT team was organized in L.A. to attack the Panther office, and they literally got their butts kicked, the SWAT team did.

So, they had to figure out other ways to disorganize the Party, and one of them was to plant either informants in the Party—Fred Hampton's bodyguard, who was the head of security for the Illinois chapter, was an FBI agent who drew the diagram of Fred's apartment for that infamous raid where Fred was murdered. I later found out—in fact, I didn't find out until this year that the body—one of the two bodyguards that traveled with me to Oregon when I got the charge for allegedly stealing a leather coat was an informant. And I didn't know that for forty years, forty-plus years.

DC: How did you find that out?

ED: Aaron was in contact with a reporter that got access to files by mistake. See, I got my FBI files back in the mid to late '70s. I think it was late '70s when the Freedom of Information Act hit. And they released a file that was about this thick, which was only a portion of what they would release. And even the file that they did release, about seventy percent of it is blacked out, and so you couldn't see names or certain events that they didn't want you to see. And then, there's still a big old portion that they wouldn't release. Well, somehow this reporter was doing a story this past year, and they mistakenly let out files that were not blacked out, and he saw the

names of informants and got in touch with Aaron. And, sure enough, one of my bodyguard's name was on that list.

So, they were infiltrating the Party and they knew that this ideological split was occurring. And Eldridge Cleaver, who was head of the international branch and was also in the same shootout in which Bobby Hutton was murdered and had been in exile in Algeria—they started sending letters, anonymous letters, to Eldridge claiming that Huey was going to have him assassinated. And they did the same thing, sending letters from Algeria, the FBI-CIA, claiming that Eldridge was going to have Huey assassinated.

And it exploded on national TV when the two were in a debate—well, actually, they were just supposed to be having a conversation, and that caused what became the Big Split. But that had been brewing for years, and that was I think in 1971, I think it was, when all that happened. So, it had already happened here in Seattle, and we had survived that. But on the national level, it was a big blow, because a lot of our friends and comrades that we trusted and still believed in were being expelled from the Party, and it was a very difficult time to go through, very difficult.

JB: [Stop. 1:53:57]

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're going again.

ED: Oh, you're going? Okay. So, I had been talking about, prior to that, the reorganization of the Seattle chapter when I got out of prison. And it wasn't like it was a total reorganization, because there was a core of Panther community workers that were—I don't know if they were really considered members of the Party, but they still ran the office and were running the programs. The breakfast program was still being run out of a couple of locations; we expanded it back to five. The medical clinic was still being run a couple of days a week, but I

closed it so that I could reorganize a family medical center, which eventually became the Carolyn Downs Family Medical Center.

And then, we got a couple of other key members that joined at that point: Ron Johnson, who was like my deputy, my lieutenant, and helped put us back into this position where we were seen again as a viable community organization. In fact, in 1975, there was a local black newspaper, the *Medium* newspaper, [1:55:00] which still is being published today, that had organized what they called the Unsung Hero Award. And it was expected that that Unsung Hero Award would go to prominent members of the community, you know, more mainstream. And one year, that year, '75, we were nominated for the Unsung Hero Award because of our breakfast programs and the other work that we did, and we won the award.

And the mayor and the city council president walked out of the proceedings before we could get the award. They went out the backdoor. [Laughs] It was on—it was being broadcast live on TV when we won the Unsung Hero Award, and we were still the Black Panther Party. It was a *shocking* moment for [laughs] for, I think, the establishment that the Black Panther Party would get that recognition.

DC: I was going to ask just that—

JB: That's kind of a nice parallel with your experience at the Seattle Tennis Club.

ED: Absolutely! [Laughs]

DC: Yeah. I was just going to ask just that question that when you were doing the survival programs and clearly taking a leadership role in the community and providing things for the community, did the power structure start to come around or—?

ED: I don't—

DC: What was the relationship with the mayor's office?

ED: I don't think the power structure came around. I mean, we were still very contentious, though there was an interesting thing that occurred in those early years when we were in the fortified office. And I think it was probably in 1970 when the chapter—it was right after the L.A. raid, and the FTA was making their rounds around the country raiding Panther offices, and they came to Seattle to raid the Seattle office.

And Mayor Wes Uhlman at the time, when the FTA came to him for tactical support from the Seattle Police Department to raid the Seattle office, and he asked, "So, why do you want to raid the Seattle office?" And they said, "Because our informants tell us that they have illegal weapons," which was always the excuse that they had was that the Panther offices had illegal weapons. And Wes Uhlman said, "Well, my informant tells me that they don't have illegal weapons, that all of their weapons are legal," which they were. And he said, "So, I'm not going to give you tactical support so you can have a bloodbath in my city."

And while we didn't know *that* was going on, that conversation—and since then I've had a great relationship with Wes, the mayor at that time, and we've kind of talked and laughed about that, you know, thirty years later on panels when we've been talking together. But at the time, there was a reporter who was popular in Seattle, Don McGaffin, who was down in the police station that night that the raid was supposed to take place.

And he was kind of hunting around for a story, as reporters usually do, and he saw these officers like polishing their weapons and strapping them on, getting their vests on, their bulletproof vests ready, and getting all of their stuff lined up. And he said, "What's going on?" And they said, "We're going to go get those Dixon brothers tonight." And he was out on patrol with them and he called us before he left the station and said, "They're going to raid your office tonight," and so, he tipped us off.

And we went on what we called Red Alert and buttoned down all the hatches, got on our phone trees, because we would have—we had a routine. First, lock everything up and get all your weapons lined up and your ammunition out, whatever, and gas masks on. We had full combat gear; we had bulletproof vests and gas masks. And we also had this phone tree where we would call ten people, and they would call—everyone that we called would call ten people, and everyone of them that were called would call ten people. Within, you know, a matter of twenty minutes, there were several hundred people out in front of the Panther office, so we had a buffer. And so, if they were going to attack the office, they had to clear these people out first and then [2:00:00] have people—you know, get them far enough away, [laughs] but people would still be there and observing what was going on.

DC: Of course.

ED: We used that tactic several times when they were attempting to attack our office successfully to thwart off an attack. But that night, we were there and ready, and the raid never came. And we found out days later that the reason why it didn't come was because the mayor had decided not to give the FTA, or the ATF, tactical support. In fact, that year, when he went to the National Mayors Conference in D.C., he was uninvited—he met—he was asked to go into a back room with Haldeman, who was on Nixon's staff, and Haldeman blasted him and said, "Why did you do this? You thwarted what the president wanted, blah-blah-blah." And he said, "You're uninvited from the Presidential Dinner!" And he said, "Fine! We can go out and have a good time now," [laughs] him and his staff. He tells that story—he would tell that story years later.

But, see, I think that, while we had a contentious relationship with the powers that be, you know, there was always somebody like that that recognized, you know, that had some sense

of civility and worth about who we were. And so, we didn't openly hug arms with them, but after, you know—see, we had to make a transition. In 1976, there were a few incidents with central headquarters with me and Elaine Brown, who is now head of the chapter, and I won't go into detail about it. You can read about it in the book. Aaron talks about it briefly in his book.

But I wasn't going to back down, and we ended up taking over all of the programs and basically seceding from the Black Panther Party, but we continued to run all of the programs. In fact, it was in those years, between '68 and '79, that we established the Carolyn Downs Family Medical Center. We still, in fact, credit it as a Black Panther clinic, because that's where it grew out of, but it was in those years that we actually did the final arrangements and plans and got a building donated from—you know, I mentioned that we continued to have support in the community. There was a wealthy white businessman who was very progressive, who owned a building.

Oddly enough, before cable became popular, it was, in fact, the precursor to—what's the big cable conglomerate now? Xfinity by whatever it is? They had an office—they didn't even have an office. Their *tower* was on Madrona Hill, because it was a hill, and they were in this small portion upstairs of this building that was sitting empty that this businessman owned.

And we saw the building. We thought it would be a great location for the clinic, and we approached him about it, and we had somebody make the introduction for us. And he said that he would sell us the building, I think for—it was worth a quarter of a million dollars back then. He sold it to us for like twenty dollars, or two hundred dollars, or some ridiculous amount. And what he did—I remember what he did. He donated—no, it wasn't twenty dollars. It was some amount, but he donated—he lowered the price, he donated the down payment himself, and then our

monthly payment for the building came out of the rent that we collected from the cable company. [Laughter] It's an interesting story.

So, we still had these connections in the community, and we still had a presence, and they still knew of who we were. In fact, I had put plans together to open up a school similar to the one that was being run in Oakland. I think one of the things that got me in trouble with Elaine that I had the audacity to say that we could have a school here in Seattle. [Laughs] But we were in pursuit of that before life happened for me in a different way.

You know, all of those years, from '77—excuse me, '67 all the way up until 1982, my whole existence [2:05:00] was giving back to the community, as was everybody, every Panther. You know, we called ourselves "servants of the people." In order to be a servant of the people, you had to—you know, people came first, and your needs came second.

So, I never had a desire to, you know, to buy a home or to—even though I had kids by this point. I was married along the way, and my wife was—I was still, I had just gotten out of prison. I had to teach my wife—I blindfolded her and put her in a dark room and had her dismantle an M-1 carbine and put it back together again, so that she could defend herself if I wasn't around. And she took care of the Panther children for years, and we had our own, four of our own.

And, even though we had families, we still—everything was centered on serving the community. We never took anything for ourselves. And it was at, you know, at some point, as a 32-year-old with growing kids, I realized, you know, [laughs] I've got to do something for my family. And I had been out of the Party now for six years.

DC: How *did* you make ends meet before that? Did people help you out?

ED: A variety of ways. My wife was on welfare. She got tired of that and went to school and got a job. And so, you know, we just—and within the organization, we would always make sure that Party members had their basic needs met. So, we didn't get a salary or anything, but our basic needs were met. You know, help with the rent or food or whatever, that was always taken care of. So, that's how we made ends meet. Party members always were able to collaborate and pool together resources so that everybody had what they needed to survive. But no one took salaries, you know, that kind of thing.

And my story is kind of an interesting—took an interesting twist. I actually [clears throat] was introduced to Amway. And [clears throat] the thing that Amway did for me was, one, it made me realize that there were things in life that I could achieve beyond the Party and the Revolution, because that had been my whole life, my whole adult life until I was basically thirty-two years old. And I read three books that are books that I still share with people today, young people that are trying to figure out what to do with their lives.

We read tons of books in Amway the brief time that I was in there, but the three that stood out: One was *The Magic of Thinking Big*, but I had always thought big, because I had always thought about, you know, the clinic and the school. I wanted to do more than just a small version, but I wanted something bigger, which is why I closed the free medical clinic to open the family medical center. I went from—decided we wanted to go from the concept of just the summer Liberation School, which we had expanded to a full-blown summer school program, to a full accredited school. And so, but that book kind of galvanized thinking about the possibilities for me and why I thought that way, which largely came from my father, as I mentioned, his being a visionary of sorts.

And then, I read *The Magic of Believing* and *The Power of Positive Thinking*, which really began, you know, were the foundations of my own personal growth outside of the—beyond the Black Panther Party. I was very quickly able to turn the work that I had done—we had already transitioned the Party into a nonprofit group. We became instead of—the name of our first clinic was the Sidney Miller Free Medical Clinic. Well, I changed that into the Sidney Miller Community Service Center and got a 401(c)3 [Note: 501(c)3], and we operated as a nonprofit organization. We got a board of directors. I had prominent blacks on that board of directors, and our board president was Dr. Bob [2:09:35], who was really inspirational in continuing the leadership of, at that point, our organization, our nonprofit organization. And we eventually transformed the—you know, transitioned off the clinic to the nonprofit corporation, so it could become their own [2:10:00] entity and continue to be run by the community, which is why it's still running today. And—

JB: Excuse me just a second.

ED: Um-hmm.

JB: That's better. Okay, we're back again.

ED: And so, we transitioned the clinic into its own nonprofit so that it could become its own entity, which is why it's maintained today.

[Sighs] But my own transition, then, now was occurring, and these books and this experience with Amway taught me to begin to identify something that I could do on my own outside of the Party. And I didn't know what that was going to be.

My first job interview that I had was the director of the Al Davies Boys and Girls Club in Tacoma. And I nailed the interview, and I guess the confidence spewed out. And it was an interesting transition for me, because here was a club that primarily served the black community

in Tacoma, Washington, which is a smaller city here to the south of Seattle. But out of the four Boys and Girls Clubs in that city, it was sitting on a gold mine, because forty years earlier, it was known as the Downtown Tacoma Boys Club, when in the inner city were wealthy white people. And they were the barons that owned the sawmills, you know, the pulp mills, and the shipping industry in Tacoma, and they left hundreds of thousands of dollars, which turned into millions of dollars, to that one club.

And when I got there and—it's kind of the—the irony is that, while they left it to that club when it was their sons and daughters who were going there—in fact, back then, it was just their sons, because it was the Boys Club, the Downtown Tacoma Boys Club. Forty years later, the flight had occurred, [laughter] and this club was sitting in the middle of the black community, and, in fact, they used some of those capital funds to build a brand new Boys and Girls Club. They had the newest club in the city.

But the operational funds that they had access to—in one fund, they had a little over a million dollars in it, and the club had a right to spend, through the wills that they had left and through the rules, they had a right to spend up to ninety percent of the principal, which meant that the fund would always grow, but they would always have at least ninety percent of whatever the principal was at the time to put into operations.

Well, when I got to that club, little if any of that money was going into that club. The executive director of Pierce County Boys and Girls Clubs, who was actually housed in my building, was using that money to keep afloat the other Boys and Girls Clubs. And the football team at my club—we had three age levels, and they were all sharing the same equipment, old equipment, sharing the same old equipment, which was unsafe, because some kids had big old helmets on that wouldn't fit for the older kids, etcetera.

So, I remember the first thing I did after I got a lay of the land was I told the executive, I said, "Look, I'm going to go before my board and ask for thirty thousand dollars to outfit my football team, you know, the three separate football teams, and put them in—so they have their own uniforms, etcetera." And he said, "Well, that's fine, but I'm going to oppose you." And I said, "Fine. I'm up for a good fight."

So, my program director went out and got all—did all the research, you know, the safety regulations, why these kids should be in the three uniforms. I had parents come in to the board meeting and give testimony about their kids playing and the fact that the money that was supposed to be for that community should be there. And when it came to a vote—all my board members were white except for one black businessman—I remember a young white businessman leaned back in his chair with his big cigar, and he said, "Hell! I like football!" [Laughter] And everybody else rolled after that, and the money was given for the football team.

And I turned around—like, I started new programs there because I had come out of this experience where you organize in a community. And so, I spent a couple of years there, and it was time to move on. [2:15:00] And I ended up—my father, before he passed, suggested that I interview, go to—actually, not interview, but go and ask Walter Hundley, who had been the director of the Model Cities Program and now was the superintendent of the Seattle Park Department, and go to ask him for—I'd been out of work for a couple of months now and I needed a job. So, I went down to Walter to see if there was some way he could find a position for me.

And he said, "Well, you know, we'll see." He said, "We're going to try you out in a position. I've got something I—we'll find out something for you, and we'll see how that works out." And he said, "But I want you to remember the time you came into my office with your

shotguns drawn." And I said, "Oh! Yeah, [laughing] I do kind of vaguely remember that." No way I could get out of that!

So, what he ended up doing was, I ended up being appointed as the training manager, or training officer, and more significantly, he also named me the EEO officer. And so, I knew nothing about EEOC, so I had to educate myself and I went down and got books. I went to the EEOC office and read all this stuff. And so, then I ultimately was responsible for drafting their sexual harassment policy and designing training, sexual harassment training, and training it, but more importantly, enforcing it. And it was at a time when women were still considered, you know, excess baggage in traditional—nontraditional workplaces. And so, in the trades in the Park Department—they had plumbers, electricians, carpenters, painters, truck drivers—Walt instructed me to go out and recruit women for these positions.

And so, I developed a recruiting program and recruited them into these positions in offices where these old-school guys, the old boys network, thought that women should be barefoot and pregnant. And so, I became the enforcement officer to protect them once we hired them, protect them against harassment, sexual harassment. And so, I got kind of the reputation around there, "Who is he coming to get today?" if I came out and inspected a work area or came out and talked to people. I ended up recommending—I couldn't fire them, but I recommended the firing of several key high-level managers in that department that were held up—the firings were held up under review.

And it kind of got me a reputation of being—you know, it was back to—the circle also had come full circle in that work, in that when we were in the Party, you know, prostitutes would come to us and want us to help them get off the street. Women who were being beaten by their husbands would come to us to stop the beating. And we would go do it. And so, here I was in

this role in a professional capacity protecting women and helping them [coughs] navigate through these jobs.

It wasn't about five or six years after that, after I had gotten into that role, that two women that started this company that I'm currently president of, Executive Diversity Services, contacted me to be a part of their company. They had heard something about the work that I had done. And I left the City and I started working with them in '88. They formed the company in '87. I left the City in 1990 and haven't looked back since. And now, I'm president of Executive Diversity Services and I do multicultural work across the globe.

And the work that I do around diversity and inclusion and getting organizations to identify ways to value differences and create inclusive workplaces is what I do today. And that really is the full-circle piece. And so, when I landed in France three years ago to give this presentation, it was about that transition from revolutionary to interculturalist, but it really started with that multicultural experience in Madrona. That's where it all began.

DC: Um-hmm.

JB: [I'm going to] stop for a second?

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're back on.

DC: So, because we are in this sort of wrap-up, you know, looking back, reflective [2:20:00] conversation, I just wondered what—you've talked a little bit about, I think, some of what you might be proud of, as far as accomplishments—but I'm curious what, for you, is the accomplishment that you feel most proud of? And then, I'm also interested if you have any regrets, looking back.

ED: Well, you know, I think that probably—and I would probably share this with my comrades in the Black Panther Party, because we didn't do things for individual achievement—was that we were, I think I'm most proud of the fact that we were principled, that we stood for—we meant what we stood for and we stood for what we meant. We didn't deter from that. We couldn't be bought off. And we considered ourselves the vanguard because of that, because we had that—it's more than pride. It's kind of we had that character that we stood for something, and I think that that's what I'm most proud of.

The other things were [clears throat] the natural result of our organizing and our efforts, you know, the breakfast programs, the clinics, [clears throat] the various things that we accomplished and did for the community. We take a collective pride in that; that was all of us that did that. But I think it's the fact that we stood for something and we stood by it, we were principled and we stood by those beliefs, and we never gave in to them, I think that's the thing that I'm most proud of, and proud of it, as I said, in a collective sense. It's not an individual thing.

DC: Um-hmm. Any regrets, looking back?

ED: Yeah, that we didn't get Nixon out of office sooner. [Laughter] You know, there's a lot written about the Gen X, you know, that followed our generation, the Boomers, and the fact that there was a fair amount of political apathy and kind of a lost sense of what to do, and I think the fact that we didn't fully realize all of our goals, you know. I think there's, you know, obviously there are things along the way that one might wish that they could have done differently or handled differently. And so, I think it's kind of pointless to look back and have too many regrets. You have to look at the good things that override some of things that maybe weren't as good, and you know be proud of those things and the fact that we survived and we

accomplished those things and we left a lasting legacy. So, if there is a regret, [laughs] we didn't change things enough, because there's still so much to be done.

DC: And finally, a related—I'd just like to ask you to reflect on the term "Civil Rights Movement." I'm sure people come to you to ask you about your involvement in the Movement. What is the Civil Rights Movement? How do you define it or look at it?

ED: Well, [clears throat] see, I think the actual event is bigger than the Civil Rights Movement. We never considered ourselves civil rights activists. My initial reaction to and understanding of civil rights, when you think about Jim Crow laws and you think about ending segregation and trying to achieve some form of equality in a variety of areas, I think that that is—was needed and relevant in the achievement of those things. We saw our struggle one for human rights and on a much broader plane, at least in our eyes.

And that's not to put down the Civil Rights Movement, you know, the movement in the South to end segregation, to be able to ride on a bus or to sit at a lunch counter. Those were important things. We tended to point towards the denial of basic humanity and the right to exist as a human without being subject to [2:25:00] racism and poverty and human dignity. And so, I think that the Civil Rights Movement meant that. We approached it from a more of a "we're going to take it back" than "give it to me" kind of approach, and that's I think what put us in the crosshairs.

And so, that's what our Movement was about. It was a revolutionary philosophy. It was, in our eyes, it was much more—in our eyes, it was much more impactful, much more tangible to take it all the way. I mean, I think you could people all of the civil rights that they want and still deny them the basic right to humanity. And so, I think it was more about God-given rights than just civil rights is what we were involved in, what we stood for.

DC: So, where are we now, do you think?

ED: Whew! [Laughs] We're still on the trail. I think that the impact of—it's not obviously just racism. It's the impact of—I think it has always probably been about haves and have-nots, and who has the upper hand, and who are the downtrodden, who's got the resources and who doesn't. And that can rear its ugly head in so many different ways.

I think that the—this, what they call the Great Recession of the last five years, I think just galvanized for a lot of people how delicate of a ground people stand on. During that time frame, when people—people still are losing their homes and their livelihoods. I was listening to a report out of Greece just about a month ago, where the middle class there has almost completely been wiped out, where people who had nice middle-class jobs have to go out and beg for food today. And you see that happening now in Spain, where the unemployment rate is I think fifty-some percent or some awful number.

And the fact that all of that happened because of a small group of greedy businessmen that banked on the housing market collapsing so that they could get rich. And during that time span, the last five or six years, while all of this has been happening to the middle class, let alone what has happened to the poor, the rich have gotten ten times richer and the gap has gotten bigger.

And, you know, I'm a realist and I'm also conscious of the fact that the world is not just full of evil. My mother was telling me about a story that she saw on TV last week about a group of doctors who—and it doesn't matter what color they are—a group of doctors who have a ship that is off the East Coast of Africa that are treating patients who have been grossly disfigured by a variety of things, whether it be lack of nutrition in their diets and disease, faces are badly deformed, teeth where they can't even chew their food. And they travel to these countries and

they specifically focus on that Eastern Coast in Africa where there's a large number of people that suffer from this. And they go in and they work with them. They diagnose them, they x-ray them, and they bring them on their ship and they totally reconstruct their face.

And this one woman who was blinded by cataracts and couldn't see the disfiguration, but knew that she had been disfigured, and when she looked into the mirror and saw, when they had removed the cataracts and replaced her lenses so that she could see and had reconstructed her face, you know, the joy in that woman's face and the joy in those doctors' hearts when they saw what they had done [2:30:00]—and their lives are given to that kind of transformation. There's a lot of good on this earth in this world in which we live.

And so, I don't dwell on the bad things. I know that we've got a lot that we need to, you know, that there's a lot to be done. One thing that my experience in the Party taught me is that one organization or one individual can't do it all. And so, you find little things that you can be part of and that you can contribute to.

There's a lot of—I was watching an ESPN episode this morning, and they were talking about these teams, just random teams around the country where a little boy with cerebral palsy, they let him enter into—he was a wrestler, and they let him enter into a wrestling match. And his opponent, who could easily have beaten him, let him pin him to the ground so he could feel this joy of winning. Another boy who was autistic who wanted to play basketball and couldn't play, and at the end of the game, they made sure that he got in the game to score. And when he missed the shot and it went out of bounds, the opposing team, instead of throwing it to their teammate, called his name and threw it to him. He thought he made a steal and got his score, you know, so he could feel good about himself.

You hear things like that, you know? You know, for every bad thing that you hear, there's a lot of good things that are going on. And so, I think it's important that, you know, while you look at where we are, and we still have lots of things to overcome, there's a lot of good things that are happening. And so, I try to focus on the little bit of good that I can do, the little bit of change that I can make. My work is about that. But there are other things that I'm working on to also try to impact some change. And so, who knows? Maybe we'll get there, and maybe we won't [be blown up as a planet]. [Laughter]

DC: Well, I want to thank you for the work that you have done. And I guess I'll just end by asking you if there's—is there anything else that you want to say or that I didn't ask that you'd like to—?

ED: Well, it'll be all in the—the rest of it will be in the book.

DC: Okay. [Laughter] Fair enough. Thank you so much.

ED: Thank you. My pleasure.

[Recording ends at 2:32:32]

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Sally C. Council